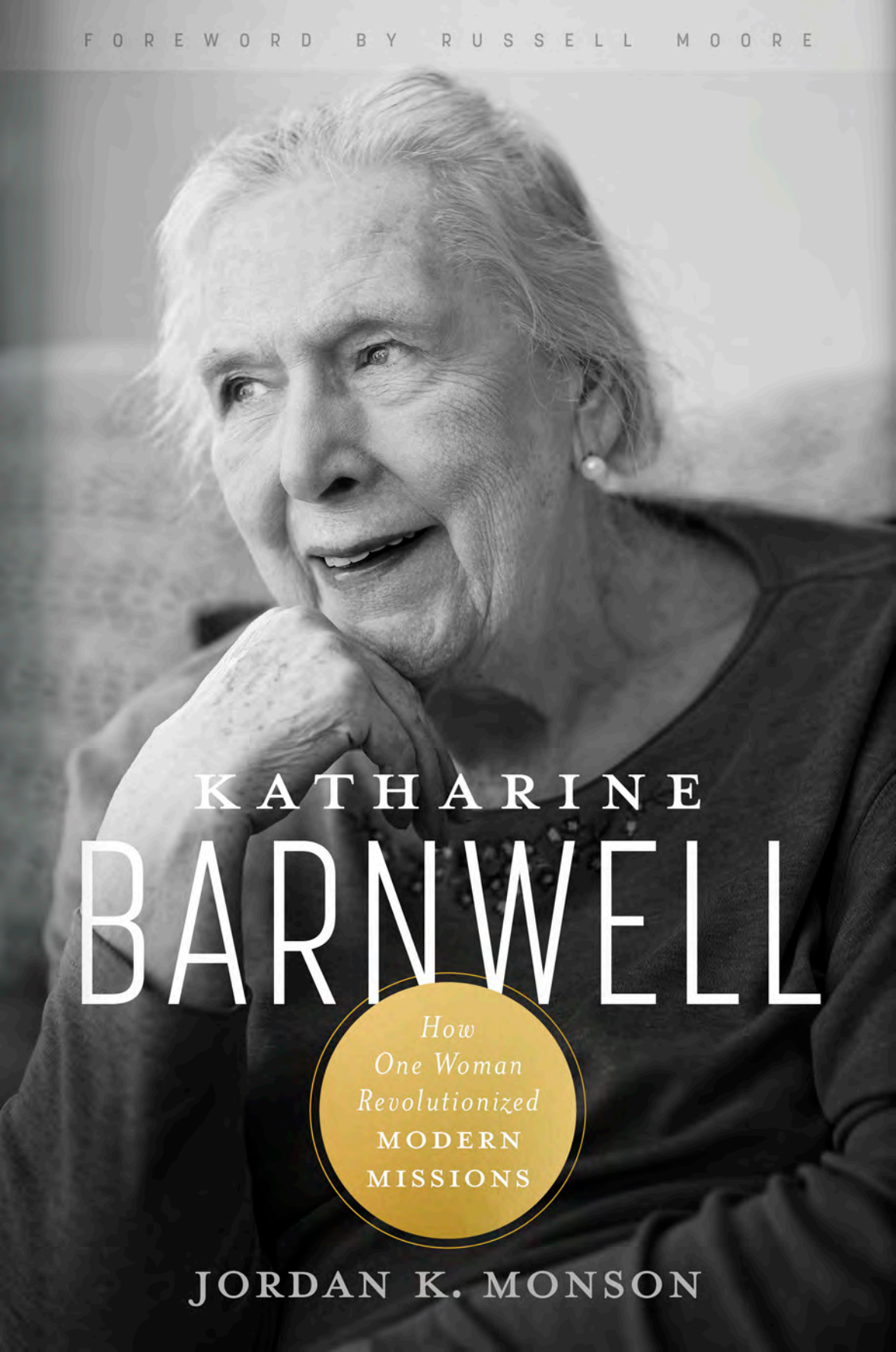


F O R E W O R D B Y R U S S E L L M O O R E

A black and white portrait of an elderly woman with short, light-colored hair. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a gentle smile. Her right hand is resting under her chin. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top and a pearl earring. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

KATHARINE
BARNWELL

*How
One Woman
Revolutionized*
MODERN
MISSIONS

JORDAN K. MONSON

KATHARINE
BARNWELL

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*How
One Woman
Revolutionized*
MODERN
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To all the missionaries whose stories remain untold.

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FOREWORD

Maybe you've never noticed this while watching a movie or reading a novel or streaming a televised series, but if you pay attention you might pick out, in almost every one of them, what's known to the author or screenwriter or script developers as a "point-of-view character." The job of this character is to be a stand-in for you, the reader or watcher. He or she is to discover information necessary to the plotline just as you do.

This kind of character is necessary because much of what we say or do in real-life is unarticulated, based on shared assumptions that don't need to be explained. So unless there's someone who's being surprised or being enlightened along with the reader/viewer, the narrative will end up with the schlocky dialogue along the lines of this: "As you know, captain, the suspect, your wife, is a wealthy heiress who has long resented her father for the way he gave her a lesser share in the family business, which, as you know, is an oil company located in Houston" or "As you know, Bzzynt-757, you and I are alien creatures from a solar system far from earth, and, as you know, we are on a journey far from our own galaxy to find a secret mineral on earth, which will fuel, as you well know, the power centers for our dying planet."

The point-of-view character—along with other things—saves us from all of that. As the character pieces things together, so can the audience. After all, if the readers or viewers already knew the plot and all its details, if there were nothing surprising or any mysteries to be solved, what would be the point of the story?

I write all of this because I suspect that in this little foreword you are reading, I am the point-of-view character—not for all of

you but for those of you who aren't familiar with Katy Barnwell or the world she inhabits. Usually if I introduce a book, it's because I know something about the subject—maybe it's on the Bible, theology, cultural engagement or Christian ethics, the fiction of Wendell Berry, or the music of Merle Haggard. Not this time.

I admire those who translate the Bible into new languages, but I know almost nothing about how they do it. I am oblivious to the intricacies of Nigerian political and cultural divides and controversies. I respect those missionaries who carry the gospel into situations that could result in their own deaths, but my list of such heroes never included Katy Barnwell until this book. If it were not for this book, I would have never heard of her.

Some of you reading this book have followed the life and ministry of Katy Barnwell, so you know something of what to expect. But maybe you're like I was; you're coming at this with new eyes. Maybe, in some ways, we are at an advantage in reading this book. We get to follow the upward swings and downward troughs in this mission, as we learn bit by bit, page by page, just how remarkable this woman is.

Maybe you're the kind of person who, like me, is sometimes tempted to cynicism. Maybe you've seen the veil lifted a few too many times on the fallen human tendency to cruelty or lying or selfishness. Perhaps that leads you sometimes to wonder whether the way to survive the world is to have the lowest expectations possible.

Now, Jesus told us not to seek after signs. We have the only sign we need—the sign of Jonah in the One who is greater than Jonah (Luke 11:29–30). Sometimes, though, Jesus does allow us to see signs of life around us. Even when John the Baptist—discouraged to despair—sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we wait for another?” (Luke 7:20). Jesus said: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them” (7:22 RSV).

This book might be something of that kind of reminder for you. Despite all the scandals and collapses we see all around us, the Spirit is still alive and rustling through the world, calling and equipping disciples such as Katy Barnwell to lose their lives in order to find them. In the Jericho Road of this present age, sometimes all we see are the priests and Levites walking to the other side, but there are many Samaritans still on that road too.

The Bible not only is still the Word of God, but there are countless people who are hearing that Word for the first time—often because there are those who, like Katy Barnwell, still believe in carrying it to the poor and to the brokenhearted, for of such is the kingdom of God.

As you read this story, maybe you will find yourself in the place of those hearing this Word for the first time. Maybe, like real-life “point-of-view characters,” their experience will prompt you to hear it anew too. And maybe this book is one way God is changing your story—leading you to places and callings you never imagined. How can I know? You and I are just point-of-view characters for the storyline of the cosmos—the story of Jesus.

Maybe in reading Katy Barnwell’s biography, you might just find the plot-twist of your own.

Dr. Russell Moore
Editor in Chief
Christianity Today

PREFACE

If it weren't for the terrorists, I would have met Katy ten years earlier.



In the early summer of 2012, I received my first Bible translation assignment over email. I would fly to Abuja, Nigeria, in two months' time to begin my on-the-job training. Under a senior Bible translation consultant, I would learn to train local translators, teach tricky biblical, linguistic, and translation concepts, and check Scripture translation for faithfulness and accuracy. For years to come, I would train under this same senior consultant until I achieved the coveted status of "Bible translation consultant."

Nervous, I scanned to the final lines of the email to unveil the name of my trainer—*Dr. Katharine Barnwell*.

A memory sparked. *That was the same person, right?* It must be. I'd seen her once before.

A year earlier, I sat at the ubiquitous round table of any hotel conference room, uneasily full on refined carbohydrates and questionable coffee. It was my first Bible translation conference. My job title was *translation consultant (in training) (intern)* in case my standing there could be any clearer.

A kind colleague leaned in my direction, signaling toward the hall's entrance. "Have you ever met the Michael Jordan of Bible translation?"

I creased my brow, eyeing the incomers. What kind of question was that? Did any of them fit that impressive bill? I frowned and shook my head.

“It’s *her*, in the light blue.” She pointed.

My head snapped back. “Her?”

My colleague’s eyes went wide, almost too wide, while she nodded. “That’s her.”

The woman in the light blue, then in her mid-seventies, faltered slightly as she walked into the great hall. No doubt the early signs of osteoarthritis, which afflicts her in full force now. It’s one of the few footholds old age has managed against her.

Stealing a glance around the room, I saw that half the conference hall watched her as well. One by one, the senior leaders I only dreamed of impressing approached her. They may as well have bowed before her. Who was she? And why was everybody so impressed with her?

I may have been the only soul there who didn’t know. Well, besides the woman herself, so oddly unaware of her stature. Unaware that to many in the Bible translation movement, there may be no one in the history of the church who’s had a greater influence on Bible translation—ever.

As I read that email a year later, I blinked hard at the words. Yes, that was her. Katy Barnwell. I didn’t know it then, but she was not just one of the most influential Bible translators in church history; she is arguably one of the most influential missionaries ever. Period. And I had the fortune of apprenticing under her.

But something happened.



Shortly before my travel date, a distress call came from Nigeria. It was my colleague, a few years ahead of me on the same career path. He was working near Jos in the Middle Belt,

the few-hundred-mile stretch where Nigeria's predominantly Muslim north and Christian south blur together.

In that troubled region, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single Christian who has not known church bombings or relatives maimed or killed. And, I'm ashamed to say, you'll scarcely meet a Muslim who has not endured the same.

The Middle Belt is ever fraught, ever tense. The work of the faithful can continue on there for months, sometimes years unharmed, and then tensions rise in a moment. A moment like the fall of 2012.

Word carried fast that there was an American Bible translator in the area. A hit was put out on his life. Receiving warning, my colleague fled just in time. But they pursued. He was hunted across the country until he could reach an international airport.

Hours later I got word. Neither I nor the other "in training" "interns" would be going to Nigeria. Not then. And not anytime soon. The seasoned veterans like Katy would stay on. God knows she'd seen much worse. But the rest of us would have to reroute, finding other projects, other trainers, and other directions for our entry into the craft.

I knew it then in part, but it would take years to fully grasp how much I had lost. Katy was renowned. She was the best—and favorite—trainer and shepherd of Bible translators for the last three generations. There was hardly a major Bible translation leader alive who wasn't trained on her methods, let alone face-to-face.

Still, decades later, any who have trained under Katy betray a twinkling in their eye when remembering her care, her shepherding. I knew she was good. I knew she was influential. But I didn't know how influential. And maybe it's a blessing I didn't know then.

I didn't know that many of the largest mission organizations in the world reinvented their methods based on her work, going on to reap a harvest markedly greater than before. I didn't know then that Katy enjoys more than one hundred times the

influence of Billy Graham (see chapter 33). The heavyweights of heaven do not always stand in the order we imagine.

I didn't know then that there had been a great battle for the future of Bible translation. One camp fought to keep the West in the pilot's seat. The other fought to equip the global church to lead the work itself. The West would come alongside to help—not lead. The latter method won the day and is used all over the world in approximately 85 percent of the Bible translation work worldwide. Katy led that charge.

Her training, her students (and their students), and her books have trained thousands of Bible translators around the world. You'd be hard-pressed to find a dozen Bible translation projects on the face of the planet not swimming downstream of her work.

Estimates vary, but she's likely directly influenced upwards of three thousand Bible translation projects. Some have started Bible translation institutions, like William Cameron Townsend, who began Wycliffe and (what is now called) SIL.¹ His institutional influence will be greater. But nobody in church history holds a dim candle to Katy's *direct* influence on translation.

I didn't know then that the last sixty years had seen the greatest missiological shift since the early church. *From the West to the rest* was in its death throes. That runner was old, tired, injured. But a faster runner, a better runner, stood waiting ahead. The global church was ready. But somebody needed to pass the baton. More than any other Bible translation figure, it was Katy who passed the baton. She equipped the global church. She democratized Bible translation, sealing the coffin on the colonial era behind her.

Yes, I'd lost out on much. But through the mysterious workings of God, that was not the end of a friendship with Katy. More than a decade later, I had the honor of sitting with her in her English home. Of making her a meal. Of hearing her full story. I can't express the honor I felt at listening to the firsthand stories of a living legend so that I might write this book.

It may have been the loss of that initial assignment that made her influence stick in my mind. Whenever I had the chance, I asked Bible translation leaders about her. I read her books and articles. I paid closer attention when the old-timers described how they used to do things and how they do things so differently now. And at the center of those great changes, those great upheavals, stood Katy Barnwell.

Reading the pantheon of famous missionaries, the *best of* lists, I would furrow my brow. I knew a story like these. More impressive in breadth and reach. Yet her story remained untold. It was as if a Billy Graham—a Mother Teresa—had lived and worked, all without a chronicler. She was the forgotten missionary—or as I like to say, the greatest missionary you’ve never heard of.

Not only does she deserve a prominent place in the pantheon of *Great Missionaries*, but I believe she may be the last in that list. Not the last missionary. No, there won’t be any end to those until his kingdom comes. What I mean is that she is the last great Western missionary.

The last five hundred years, the era of the “West to the rest” is over. The church is different now. Missionary work is different now—for the better. Now the whole church is reaching the whole world. Korean missionaries come to North America. Nigerian missionaries go to Europe as Europeans go to Nigeria. Brazilian missionaries go to Northern Africa. Chinese missionaries go to Japan. That old era is dead and buried, and Katy held the shovel.²

I think of it like this:

My young children play a game, familiar to many from childhood. In it the ground is a kind of hazardous substance like lava. They terrorize the house and remove every couch cushion they can find, laying pathways on the ground as they move from their starting place to their destiny.

For lack of material, they’ve long learned to collect the cushions they’ve just trodden, laying them again ahead and leaving

no bridge back to their beginning. My kids arrive in a new location, a new room, ready for new endeavors. But you'll find barely a trace of the route they traveled to arrive there.

This reminds me of Katy's work. She has borne Bible translation forward so thoroughly that it's scarcely possible to retread her path. Much remains to be done, but the global church stands far ahead now. The old trodden paths are long gone. The global church is laying highways now—on cushions still warm from her hands.

New Year's Eve 2023
Goring-on-Thames,
Southern Oxfordshire
UK

Jordan K. Monson

BIBLES AND BULLET HOLES

In July 2007, Bible translators from a dozen Nigerian languages gathered under a steel-roofed school shelter in the town of Bayara, Nigeria. For the next three weeks, the translators and a few Nigerian, American, and British consultants would work around the clock to begin translating the Gospel of Luke.

On Friday, July 27, they had wrapped their first week of work and made plans to unwind. Multilingual collaboration is exhausting, and everyone was eager to eat dinner and watch a film together.

The translators gathered their papers and books into bags. Some slung laptops over their shoulders. One of them grabbed a USB thumb drive attached to a purple lanyard, which they used to pass files back and forth and store backups of their work.

They walked half a kilometer through the warm evening air to the guesthouse where they were staying. The cooler rainy season had just begun, but this day had been neither cool nor rainy.

And as they walked, about a dozen of them in all, they were eager to get back and enjoy a night of fellowship together.

The group finished eating around 7:30, and Veronica Gambo, the wife of one of the translation consultants, made popcorn. She began filling a large bowl, readying to carry it out to the others in the living room who were setting up the film.

But as she picked up the bowl, the kitchen door burst open, and men with automatic rifles poured in.

Veronica stood frozen. The lead gunman pushed his barrel between her shoulder blades and marched her, still bearing the popcorn, into the living room.

“Get down!” The men yelled.

“They were shooting inside the room.”¹ Said Danjuma Gambo, a Nigerian translation consultant—and husband to Veronica who carried the popcorn.

The men fired into the walls and ceiling. They forced everybody to the ground, including the translation project’s leader, a silver-haired British woman in her late sixties.

Andy Kellogg, an American working as a Bible translation consultant, remembers lying on the floor. Would the men rob them and leave quickly, or something worse? “If you’re in a remote place, and it doesn’t seem like help will be coming quickly, you can take your time as a robber. And we were in a remote place.” Kellogg said.²

Andy considered that he may never see his wife again. His children. Then he remembered his colleague in the adjacent room. She was young. Female. The men hadn’t searched that room. Not yet.

Unarmed and lying prostrate, Andy wondered, if the men go into that room—if something happens to her, *What are my next steps?*

Fortunately for the translators, the men were not religious terrorists. The brigands had spotted the laptops as the team made their commute on foot. That’s what they came for. They stole nine in all, along with personal belongings, passports, and credit cards.

And somehow, by the grace of God, the robbers never checked that adjacent room with the young woman. It was as if they were blinded to it. The young woman inside was left alone.

All the translation work they’d done was on those laptops. And when there are nine different copies out there of a file,

the pressure to keep great backups diminishes. They had one backup—a USB thumb drive hanging by the purple lanyard on a nail on the wall. In those days, passing around the stick was the easiest way to keep the project synced across devices.

The raiders took everything of value they could find. “But by God’s grace, they left the lanyard with our backups hanging there on the wall,” Kellogg said. “Had God opened their eyes to it, they would have taken that also. But in his providence, they didn’t.”³

When the thieves left, the elderly project leader arose from the ground. She dusted her clothing. After checking with each translator to make sure they were okay, she spoke in that most British way.

“Right. . . . Well, we’re not going to let this stop us.”⁴

Her name is Dr. Katharine Barnwell. By any account, she’s one of the most influential missionaries in the history of Christianity. Some call her Katy. Most call her *Mother*.



Fear could have taken over that night. The projects could have halted, the spread of God’s Word slowed. But Katy was there. And the armed criminals were about to become a footnote in the story of a great life.

After half a century in missions, Katharine Barnwell was no stranger to peril. Six times she was robbed at gunpoint, twice stormed by armed robbers. She fled a civil war on foot and upriver without documentation. She endured constant threat from terrorists and constant danger from malaria. She was known to forego food and sleep so that others might eat and have a warm bed.

She wanted to press forward, but she knew that not all had her constitution for the work. So Katy spoke individually with each translator, shepherding and counseling.

Under her leadership, every last Bible translation worker decided to stay on and continue the work. They would not even postpone the workshop. God's Word would not be stopped.

Within a few minutes, Danjuma Gambo said, the group burst into song, praising God and praying for a way to finish God's work. There was one problem: *We have no computers*, Kellogg thought. *This is going to be really hard on Monday.*

But on Monday, when they returned to work, they found that every computer had been replaced. Formerly, this would have taken weeks or even months. It would have meant letters, emails, funding requests, meetings, forms, and petitions to Western agencies. But that never happened.

News of the robbery spread quickly, and before the weekend was done, "computers were provided . . . by groups in the area. There were some influential people in churches nearby who donated." Kellogg said.⁵

It was not the Western agencies who replaced the computers so they could meet their goals; it was the local Nigerian believers and churches. These homegrown congregations and benefactors wanted that work done. They believed in it. And they were driving it.

The projects would have been lost along with those nine hard drives. But still dangling on the nail, not far from a bullet hole, was that lanyard. Securely resting inside, in zeros and ones, were the backups to all the translation projects. From that thumb drive, the translation teams restored everything, and each project went on to finish the Gospel of Luke and then *The Jesus Film*, whose script comes almost entirely from Luke. Many of those projects now have full New Testaments, Kellogg said, and some have moved on to the Old Testament.⁶

Well over a million people from those languages now have access to the good news of Jesus and his Scripture in their first language. If Katy's group had given up that day—if they had given up under the threat of violence or worse—those million-plus people would not have the gospel.

This incident in northeast Nigeria is a freeze-frame from the great missiological shift that has been playing out over the past sixty years: the transfer of ownership from Western individuals and institutions to leaders and churches in the Global South. After hundreds of years, Americans and Europeans are no longer in the pilot's seat of global mission work. They have been rapidly replaced by Christians in the majority world.

Nigerian ownership is what saved the projects born from Barnwell's workshop—or at least what helped them quickly get back on their feet. And it was perhaps poetic: Barnwell, a Westerner, was one of the earliest champions of empowering Nigerians to take over translation work in their country.

In fact, no living person has likely had a greater influence on the world of Bible translation than Barnwell.⁷ But unless you've worked in Bible translation, you've probably never heard of her.

BOMBS AND TEDDY BEARS

Katharine Barnwell was born in London on August 9, 1938, to Frederick Reginald Lowry Barnwell and Norah Manning Powell. Katy's father "Reggie" was a Civil engineer who worked on railway infrastructure. When World War II began with Nazi Germany, Britain quickly scooped him up to serve in the war effort. Many wars are won and lost not on man power but brainpower. The British knew this and called up their engineers immediately.¹

Reginald Barnwell served in North Africa, Italy, and in France. And though he never spoke about it with family, he was of great service to the Allies.² He would be promoted to colonel during the war and was awarded an OBE, or Order of the British Empire, for his service. His community would call him Colonel Barnwell until he died on December 29, 1984.³

Her father's service meant that for most of Katy's first decade of life, her father was not present. And those years were not easy.

Katy's first memory is of the air raids, the sirens. When the British spotted Nazi bombers, they sounded the alarm. When the sirens sounded, Londoners never knew how much time they had before the first bomb fell. Had the best radar stations picked up the bombers over the English Channel? They may have some time. But radar in those days was young and far less capable. If the bombers escaped detection, they may only be spotted by

human observers on the coast of England. In that case, there may be only minutes to find shelter.

Starting September 7, 1940, during what is known as The Blitz, the sirens would sound 350 times in eight weeks. For fifty-seven consecutive nights, Nazi bombers descended on Britain, dropping thousands of metric tons of bombs on military and civilian areas alike. In some areas, bomb shelters were too scarce and 150,000 took refuge overnight in the tube stations.⁴

Katy's family was assigned a local bomb shelter in the crypt of a church, an underground burial place with access to tombs and coffins. Katy remembers the sirens, the always-packed emergency bag, and her mother hurrying them to the crypt. Bombs above ground and corpses below.

When I traveled to England to interview her, I asked her if she was afraid. "Not at all," she said. "We weren't old enough to be frightened."

She *was* old enough to be frightened, but children often take cues from those around them. And in Katy's mother Norah, the only emotions young Katy detected were adventure and resolve. Any parent knows the anxiety her mother must have felt, but her acting skills were strong.

In the crypt, there were new people, snacks, and other children. Katy's mother made it all seem fun. She kept a bag ready with a special selection of toys saved particularly for those occasions.

Katy remembers the special pink blanket her mother saved for those nights in the crypt. She also had a special teddy bear. It was big, almost as big as her, and it served as a sort of companion during those bombing raids in the crypt. Katy has held on to that teddy bear her entire life.

"My mother was remarkable, really," Katy said. She was raising two and then three children mostly alone while Katy's father served overseas in the war. Food was intensely rationed. Fruit and other major staples disappeared overnight. Due to the sudden Vitamin C shortage in the UK, the government rallied many volunteer groups to forage. One of Katy's early memories

is of foraging for rose hips, many times richer in Vitamin C than even oranges.

England went from one of the most peaceful and wealthy nations on earth to, nearly overnight, enduring constant bombing and not having enough fruits and vegetables for adequate nutrition. And for nearly a year, they stood alone as the only major force fighting the Nazis in Europe.⁵

To escape the dangers of war, Barnwell and her siblings were sent away to live with family in the countryside, much in the way *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* opens. Like the fictional Pevensie children, Katy remembers filling her days in similar ways and getting in nonfictional trouble.

Moving away from the London bombings would mark a life of dozens of moves. Later in life, entire years passed in which Katy never lived anywhere. Three weeks in this country, five weeks in that, and on and on, helping innumerable Bible translators in every inhabited continent. But that would come later.

She remembers playing and that scolding so common to children after arriving at grandparents' homes—a house not ready for children and grandparents not ready for children's play. Her grandparents had a nice garden. And though the children were allowed in the garden, there were a few trees they were not allowed to climb. In a great irony for the future Bible translator and writer of exegetical commentaries on Genesis, Katy could not avoid the apple trees.

We don't want to commit the biographer's original sin of snatching a scene from childhood and interpreting too much through it, but it's hard not to see this boundary testing continue throughout her entire career. Katy was not a disobedient child. Nor was she difficult as an adult. But if you gave her what she considered a foolish rule, she would not follow it.

The war dictated Katy's childhood. Not only was her father mostly away for her first seven years of life, but Katy knew little of stability or community beyond her mother and siblings. And it wouldn't end there.

**KATY BARNWELL IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE
GREATEST BIBLE TRANSLATORS TO EVER LIVE.
SHE'S ONE OF THE GREATEST MISSIONARIES
IN ALL OF CHURCH HISTORY.**

What if Mother Teresa or Billy Graham lived and worked—and nobody knew their names? What if one of the church's most influential missionaries went almost unnoticed?

Meet Katharine (Katy) Barnwell. Within Bible translation, she's a legend. Outside of Bible translation, few have heard of her. But not even Billy Graham holds a candle to what God did through Katy.

From hiding as a child from Nazi bombing raids, fleeing civil wars, and remaining calm under terrorist attacks and armed gunmen, to utterly revolutionizing every field she touched, Barnwell's life proves there is no need to treat the missionary hall of fame as if its ranks are closed. On the contrary, her kingdom labor reveals that God is still in the business of raising up contemporary "greats" who are willing to face danger, go the distance, lift up God's Word in unprecedented ways, and see the lost turn to Christ in droves. In fact, there may be no "great" in all of church history who matches Barnwell's level of influence.

All around the world, hundreds of millions of new believers read and hear Scripture in their own language because of Barnwell's work, books, and language training. By some estimates, about 3,000 completed or in-process Bible translations swim directly downstream of her work. Since she rebuilt *The Jesus Film Project's* methods, more than 300 million viewers around the world have become followers of Jesus.

Given such accomplishments, one might expect Barnwell to be arrogant or aloof, and yet those who know her best report sweet surprise at how warm, endearing, patient, and feisty she is.

Her African colleagues call her Mama Katy, and such a name is fitting. She is truly the mother of modern Bible translation and the mother of twenty-first-century missions.

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